



Olbia

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Ufficio Stampa – Press Office

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Rally d'Italia-Sardegna pre-event press conference questions

When: 1300hrs, Friday 4 June, 2010

Where: Media Centre, Rally Headquarters, Olbia

Attendees:

Teemu Arminen

Burcu Çetinkaya, Peugeot Sport Turkey

Juho Hänninen, Škoda Motorsport

Andreas Mikkelsen, M-Sport

Guy Wilks, Škoda UK Motorsport

Marcello Lotti, General Manager, Intercontinental Rally Challenge

Angelo Sticchi Damiani, President, CSAI

QUESTION TO JUHO HÄNNINEN:

Welcome to Sardinia Juho, the IRC's first visit here but a welcome return to gravel for you. Given your seven-point lead in the championship how important is a win here this weekend?

“Of course it's very important because we are going to some Tarmac rallies after this and over there it will be much, much more difficult to win or even be on the podium. Therefore it's very important to get a good result here but we all know how difficult that will be. It is quite tricky stages and there are a lot of good drivers so it won't be easy.”

QUESTION TO GUY WILKS:

Turning to you Guy I understand you have a new car – well an almost new car – for this event. Can you tell us about that and what difference that will make to your chances of success here?

“It's a different car, not a new car. It doesn't make a great difference because the car is the same specification to my other Fabia. We'll approach this rally in the same way we do every rally, which is to do our best. We did a small pre-event test here in Sardinia where we tried some small things on



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the car, which we haven't been able to do until now. It's made me feel a lot more comfortable in the car so we're looking forward to this event very much."

QUESTION TO MARCELLO LOTTI:

Firstly, thank you Marcello for taking time out of your schedule to join us here. We've had four different winners from the opening four rounds. What is your view of the season so far and the prospects for IRC's first visit to Sardinia?

"In Sardinia we want to ensure a great show like we did with the first four events, with more winners and a good show. I am very happy we have the opportunity to show four stages live and based on the competition from the first four events I am sure it will be a great show, especially here in Sardinia. I have to say thank you to the president of the federation, Angelo, I have to say thank you to all his staff, thank you to the organiser Antonio and thank you to Sardinia. It is really important to the IRC calendar. The stages, the location is perfect to do a live TV broadcast and to have a good TV product. I am sure on Monday everyone will be happy."

QUESTION TO MARCELLO LOTTI:

As well as the potential for a great battle for first place, one of the most exciting things about this rally is that four stages will be shown live on Eurosport. How important is this innovative TV production to the series and the various stakeholders?

"It's important. I have a busy time but it is important to come here to Sardinia to demonstrate what is important and that is having live TV coverage of the rally, especially to help and recreate the popularity around rallying. I find also time to go to Monte Carlo earlier in the season because I want to see the same live rally because it's really important, not just for the IRC but for all of rally."

QUESTION TO BURCU ÇETINKAYA:

Welcome back to the IRC Burcu. Can you tell us about your programme for 2010 and how has it been made possible?

"We are going to do seven rallies in the IRC, starting here. I am very excited because we formed Peugeot Sport Turkey and they have not been in rallying for a long number of years. I am very happy



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to drive a Super 2000. We are also the official car of Yokohama tyres and this is also something very special for us. It is the first race and I want to see where we are because there is a big competition. I am sure we are going to have to work a lot and really hard but I am happy to have the opportunity to do that.”

QUESTION TO ANDREAS MIKKELSEN:

Welcome Andreas. Although you’ve done an IRC event before you’re probably best known for your achievements in the World Rally Championship so what has made you chose the IRC?

“The main reason is Hankook comes along. They cannot enter the world championship so they are using IRC to develop their tyres. It’s a good arena to develop their tyres because we have Pirelli and we have BFGoodrich and many good drivers well so it is the best arena for me and also for the tyres.”

QUESTION TO TEEMU ARMINEN:

Welcome to the IRC Teemu. What is your aim for the weekend – do you look to try and beat some of the IRC regulars or are your Italian Gravel Rally Championship ambitions more important?

“We have to concentrate on the Italian championship. The first round of shakedown we already noticed this rally will be difficult for Group N cars because we broke our driveshaft. There are a lot of really top drivers in the IRC so it would be nice to keep the gap to them quite low and also get some good times on the stages.”

QUESTION TO JUHO HÄNNINEN:

You prepared for Sardinia with a test on Monday but you also did a rally in Portugal the previous weekend. Can you tell us how that went and how it will help you this weekend?

“It was a good rally but quite difficult. On Friday it was perfect but then on the second and third days it was a little bit difficult but I learned a lot. We had good speed but Ford had some good drivers and I needed to push quite much and use the road as much to compete with them. But then I noticed the limit and hit a little bit the suspension.”



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QUESTION TO BURCU ÇETINKAYA:

I gather a rather successful rally driver helped you prepare for this event. Can you tell us who that was, what he did to help you and how much of a benefit do you think it will be?

“I had one test in Turkey with Sébastien Ogier and then we did another test in France, which was for Tarmac. Obviously he is maybe the best driver in the world so it was a great experience and for my driving it was quite helpful and we will try to apply as much of it as we can. He tried to show me where I was weak such as the braking points.”

QUESTION TO GUY WILKS:

Now Guy, although you're run under the Škoda UK Motorsport banner, your team is actually based in Italy. What is the team like to drive for, how good is your Italian and if England play Italy in the World Cup Final who do you think will win?

“I'm not concentrating on the World Cup Final at the moment but England have a long way to go and so do Italy after the last two games they've played. It doesn't cause me any problems [being in an Italian team] and we manage to communicate quite well. I have an Italian team, a French engineer, English driver and Welsh co-driver so mix that all together and it can be quite confusing at times but we usually manage to sort it out.”

QUESTION TO MARCELLO LOTTI:

Returning to you Marcello, we see more and more drivers signing up for the IRC. Why do you think this is and what are the prospects of more drivers and manufacturers taking part?

“I want to say that IRC is an open series and there is not the obligation to sign-up for a full challenge. I can confirm there is more interest around from drivers and also from manufacturers. Also this is not a competitor to the WRC like a lot of journalists say and think. Really it is a series created for customers and we try to select the best events where we can find a good collaboration especially to create a good TV promotion and good TV product. This is the reason why manufacturers look at this series with interest because it can also create a customer for them. It's also more accessible than other championships.”



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QUESTION TO MARCELLO LOTTI:

The IRC is in its fourth season in 2010. What are your views on how the series has developed during this time, what aspects have you been most proud of and what can we expect in the future?

“We start four years ago with this idea because for us it was missing in the rally category that nobody take care about the national event or regional event. We wanted to create an event that gave every competitor the possibility to win and not only one or two cars. We decide to create this challenge using existing rules of national championships like S2000, N4 where there are a lot of competitor with the same car and opportunity to win. This was our strategy. Day by day we have more events that are starting to be interested to be added to the calendar. We want to continue in this direction and this strategy. Now we have perhaps too many requests to be added to the calendar and we cannot have a situation where we have 18 or 20 events. There is a limit of events where people can score points but we have to consider the number of events we have but perhaps with more requests we can select more and more good events.”

QUESTION TO ANDREAS MIKKELSEN:

Andreas, Malcolm Wilson said last week that he thinks you are good enough to win in the IRC. How does this make you feel and when do you think Malcolm will be proved right?

“It’s hard to say. Definitely we have a chance. I driven the car two times now but it feels fantastic and so are the tyres. This weekend we can compare ourselves to the other guys, which we’ve not been able to do until now. Who knows when it will come? I’m sure it will happen because it’s possible but how soon I don’t know.”

QUESTION TO JUHO HÄNNINEN:

Juho, you’ve competed in Sardinia before but how different is the route this year and how difficult will the new stages be?



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“Tomorrow’s stages are totally new and we haven’t been over them before. Sundays stages we know quite a lot of the sections from the past. It’s still a hard ground but because there are no WRC cars I think the roads can handle the second pass so it won’t be so rough without all the ruts.”

QUESTION TO TEEMU ARMINEN:

Teemu, I gather you had a small problem in shakedown this morning. Can you explain what happened?

“I didn’t lose time at all really. It was the first run to check everything was okay. But I was a bit too fast into one corner and went over a stone and that was it but nothing was serious. I did two runs after that so everything is fine now.”

QUESTION TO BURCU ÇETINKAYA:

Burcu, you are probably best known for driving less powerful, two-wheel drive cars. What has it been like to switching to four-wheel drive and a two-litre engine and what changes have you had to make to your driving style and pacenotes?

“The major challenge has been the change in speed and acceleration. The change in brakes, from two- to four-wheel drive is also big and I need time to get used to this during the year. The testing has helped a lot but still we have some work to do. It’s been a major change but I must say it’s a positive change to drive the Peugeot 207 Super 2000 and I really don’t miss my old car.”

QUESTION TO GUY WILKS:

Guy, four stages of this rally will be shown live on Eurosport. How important is that to your sponsors and partners and will your friends and family be watching back home?

“I’ll answer your first part of the question first because the second part might distract a bit! I think it’s very important. Live television for rallying is fantastic. It’s a very difficult thing to do because the cars are moving over a massive distance, not like on a circuit. It’s obviously a major challenge to broadcast it live, paint a picture and tell a story. It’s something that’s been missing from rallying for a number of years so it’s credit to Eurosport for taking up the challenge and doing a fantastic job. To answer the second part of your question, yes there will be a few people watching back home. My



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brother is on his stag do this weekend and he said he'd be watching in the pub so I have a bit of pressure tomorrow during the live stages."

QUESTION TO ANDREAS MIKKELSEN:

Andreas, there is always talk on gravel rallies about road position due to the effect of road cleaning. With the starting order on Saturday based on your car number, what do you think about your starting position for day one and how much of a factor will road position be on Sunday, based on what you learned on the recce?

"Definitely I think I can have an advantage. I've seen in the past in Sardinia that being first on the road is not very good so this position is perfect. Also if we get a good result on the first day, the second day when the results are turned around will also be very good for us. But we might not be on the pace at all so we have to see and compare ourselves against these guys. It's been a few years since I've been away from the WRC."

QUESTION TO TEEMU ARMINEN:

Being a Finn, why do you compete in Italy and how much did Tommi Mäkinen, the four-time world rally champion who built your car, influence this decision?

"We were driving in the Subaru Challenge, which was good. These roads are much slower and that way a bit difficult for us so we have to learn to drive slowly. This year the Subaru Challenge was cancelled but it was so late when we got notice about that so we decided to try to manage this gravel championship in Italy. Now we are here and we are very happy."

Questions from the floor:

QUESTION TO MARCELLO LOTTI FROM GREG STRANGE (UK), representing I-Rally and Rally Radio:

The WRC Commission president Morrie Chandler says there are 20 possible WRC rallies in the world but only room for 14 of them on the WRC calendar. He says the rest will have to go somewhere or die. Could you grow your series to accommodate them?



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“We have to be careful to increase the number of events of the IRC series. We can consider, sure, these events that at the moment don't have the opportunity to be included in the WRC calendar. But we have to find the right condition to organise or include an event in our series by considering the economy and backing from the local organiser. New Zealand is a little bit far away but it could be one. I have received an email from the New Zealand organiser to consider and include New Zealand and we have a planning meeting at the end of June. After we will see and consider the possibility to do it. What we don't want is to have too many events. Seven events are valid to score points and why not keep this and let people decide where they run. This is not a big problem in this economic period. With Poland we spoke several times and New Zealand we start to speak at the end of June.”

QUESTION TO MARCELLO LOTTI FROM GREG STRANGE

Jean Todt has set up a new working group to see how the WRC can become more popular and more attractive. You've been pretty successful in the last few years with the IRC so what advice would you give to Mr Todt?

“This is difficult to answer. I have to tell you I give my advice for sure but if we speak about the WRC we speak about the world championship and the FIA. The FIA and the promoter has to start to concentrate and recreate interest around the WRC but the calendar, the format, the rules, this is not what I can advise. There is a commission and when you have a commission you have a lot of people around and they don't speak the same language some times and it's not so easy to find a solution or compromise. But this is up to them to do it. I don't think it's right to say to follow the example of the IRC because the IRC is created for a different reason. Everybody can take part, the privateers, the young drivers can compete in the same car as the champion and with the dream and sometimes the opportunity to win the championship. For me this recreates the interest around the rally category. It's something perhaps the federation and promoter of the world championship should think about and it's the reason for the success of the IRC but it's up to them to decide what to do for the WRC. I don't feel the IRC is a competitor of the WRC. What I feel is it's a rally category to help the rally category.”

QUESTION TO GUY WILKS FROM GREG STRANGE

How can we make rallying more popular?

“It's probably not correct to compare the two but it's obvious one format is working quite a lot better at the moment in terms of television, in terms of attracting drivers and also you can have the backing of



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a manufacturer. It's a lot easier to come and compete on IRC rounds with them being more compact. For me the atmosphere in IRC is fantastic. It's a breath of fresh air. I did the WRC for quite a few years but it became quite stagnant I must say. It's nice to be involved in the IRC going to different rallies, different formats. I've got to say the television is a massive plus point for this championship."

QUESTION TO JUHO HÄNNINEN FROM GREG STRANGE

Same question to you Juho...

"Guy made some good comments and I agree a lot with him. I wouldn't like to compare so much the IRC and the WRC. But here we have live coverage and I heard only positive words from Monte Carlo about the live coverage. In the WRC not so many drivers can fight for the victory but it is different here."

QUESTION TO ANDREAS MIKKELSEN FROM GREG STRANGE

And finally to you Andreas...

"People are struggling in the financial community to go and do rallies. But the support and the TV coverage of the IRC is definitely helping out. The sponsors can say we have all this time on TV and can give more money to this than go to the WRC and get no TV coverage at all. It's also much easier to compete in the IRC."

QUESTION TO MARCELLO LOTTI FROM JOÃO FREITAS FARIA (PORTUGAL), representing Autosport magazine

Would new events coming into the IRC put at risk the existing events, such as the rallies we have in Portugal and Italy for example?

"When Portugal decide to come into the IRC it's because it was out of the WRC. We don't force nobody to stay in the IRC. For sure the Italian federation can decide to go back into the WRC, why not? But if they want to stay in the IRC we are open. We speak with everybody. What is important for us is that in IRC we pay for all the transportation for the teams when we go outside of Europe, we pay for everything. But it is too early to speak about these new events. I don't think we are ready to accept a compromise that the events when they are not in the WRC can stay one night sleeping in



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our hotel, otherwise the cost of suite will be high although this can be a solution if they want to come for one night.”